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EGYPT-USSR: With Syria absent from the Geneva peace conference, Cairo apparently feels under even greater pressure to achieve quick progress and to prove to its Arab allies that its decision to negotiate is justified.

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Without the presence and support of Syria at the negotiations, Cairo probably worries that pressures from other Arabs to break off the talks will intensify. Cairo media are thus emphasizing that Egypt is going to the conference under the mandate granted it by the Algiers summit in late November, determined to adhere with "utter seriousness" to the summit's demands for a total Israeli withdrawal and a restoration of Palestinian rights. Foreign Minister Fahmi has also been instructed, according to Al Ahram, to make it clear at the conference that Egypt is seeking an Arab solution, not merely an Egyptian one, and that Cairo is equally concerned for Syrian territory and the Sinai.

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EGYPT: The Egyptians are endeavoring to accumulate wheat well in excess of their annual consumption requirement of 5 million tons and are requesting delivery from foreign suppliers before June 30, 1974. Cairo may anticipate a six-month negotiating period and may be preparing for the contingency of renewed hostilities if the Geneva talks do not succeed.

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Egypt had a five-month supply of wheat on hand at the beginning of the October war [redacted]. Of this amount, 1 million tons probably will be carried over into 1974. Since the war, China has donated 100,000 tons, and 450,000 tons have been acquired in Romania. Contracts for 1 million and 500,000 tons, respectively, have been signed with Australia and Canada, and commercial tenders for approximately 1 million tons have been issued. Rumors persist in wheat trade circles that the USSR has agreed to supply Egypt up to 1 million tons of low-grade wheat, bringing the possible import total for 1974 to 4 million tons, compared with a normal annual import requirement of 3 million tons. Arab benefactors also have been asked to supply wheat in lieu of cash. In addition, the wheat-growing area in Egypt is to be expanded at the expense of the cotton crop, assuring more than the usual domestic harvest of some 1.5-2 million tons. In view of record high cotton prices, however, converting cotton land to wheat is a dubious economic decision.

With Arab aid money now available and still higher wheat prices expected, extra wheat purchases could be explained in economic terms. Accelerated import delivery requests at a time of tight international shipping and acute postwar congestion at the port of Alexandria suggest, however, that Egyptian contingency planning includes the resumption of hostilities if negotiations fail to produce a satisfactory settlement. [redacted]

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USSR-VIETNAM: South Vietnam PRG president Nguyen Huu Tho's current visit to the USSR has prompted the first high-level Soviet criticism of US actions in Indochina since the Paris agreement, but it does not appear to have resulted in stronger Soviet support for the South Vietnamese Communists.

Moscow has been taking a somewhat harder public line on US activity in Indochina for more than a month. The Soviets have replayed Vietnamese Communist allegations that US military aid to South Vietnam has increased and that US military personnel are still in South Vietnam in civilian guise.

At a banquet in honor of Tho on December 18, President Podgorny accused the US of supporting Saigon's attempts to "sabotage the Paris agreements" and demanded an end to "provocations." Podgorny was careful, however, to soften the statement with an optimistic allusion to Secretary Kissinger's meeting with North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho. Moreover, in pledging support for the Vietnamese, he did not go beyond what the Soviets have said since last January. Podgorny may have felt constrained to criticize the US because of similar statements made by the Chinese during Tho's earlier visit to Peking.

The Soviets in fact seemed anxious to give Tho parallel treatment to what he had received in China, where he had seen Mao and signed an aid agreement. Thus, General Secretary Brezhnev met with Tho, and a new economic aid agreement was signed.

For his part, Tho seemed anxious to put a good face on his visit to the USSR. At a press conference in Moscow on December 21, he said that though the visit was not yet over, it was already a "wonderful success."

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ABU DHABI - FRANCE: Abu Dhabi, a member of the United Arab Emirates, has bought Mirage jet fighters from France, the second such purchase in the last two years.

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[REDACTED] Deliveries will begin in two years.

Sheikh Zayid, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, apparently was pleased with the performance of three Mirage 5s received in late November under the first agreement; the remaining 11 Mirage 5s ordered in mid-1972 are scheduled to arrive in 1974. The Mirage 3 is a multipurpose aircraft with more sophisticated avionics than the Mirage 5.

Under an arrangement with Islamabad, Pakistani Air Force personnel will operate and maintain the Mirages for several years until Abu Dhabi pilots are qualified to take over.

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[REDACTED] For several years Pakistani Air Force advisers have been organizing the Abu Dhabi Air Force, which until now had consisted of only one squadron of subsonic Hawker Hunter aircraft.

Since the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in late 1971, France has been making a strong effort to replace the UK as the main supplier of arms to Abu Dhabi. In the past two years, Paris has sold Abu Dhabi some \$90-100 million in weaponry, including six Puma SA-330 helicopters, five Alouette III helicopters, and 32 Mirage supersonic aircraft. Since 1971, London has not concluded a single arms deal in the lucrative Abu Dhabi market.

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FOR THE RECORD*

Ethiopia-Sudan-Vatican: Emperor Haile Selassie and President Numayri, accompanied by the foreign minister of Zambia, will visit Pope Paul today to discuss the Middle East. A major topic will be the future status of Jerusalem.

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Bangladesh-USSR: Soviet port-clearing operations in Bangladesh will continue until June 30, 1974, according to a protocol signed December 20. The salvage operation had been scheduled to end this month, but an extension was generally expected.

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**These items were prepared by CIA without consultation with the Departments of State and Defense.*

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